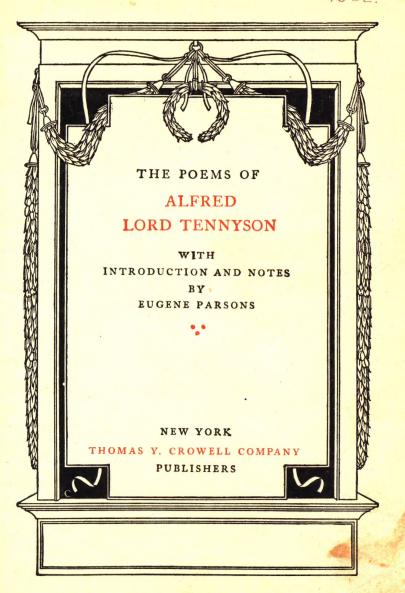


Alfred, Lord Tennyson (Photograph by Barraud)



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INTRODUCTION.

LIFE OF TENNYSON.

ALFRED TENNYSON was born Aug. 6, 1809, in Somersby, a wooded hamlet of Lincolnshire, England. "The native village of Tennyson," says Howitt, who visited the place not long after the Tennysons left it, "is not situated in the fens, but in a pretty pastoral district of softly sloping hills and large ashtrees. It is not based on bogs, but on a clean sandstone. There is a little glen in the neighborhood, called by the old monkish name of Holywell."

Here he was brought up amid the lovely idyllic scenes which he made famous in the "Ode to Memory" and other poems. The picturesque "Glen," with its tangled underwood and purling brook, was a favorite haunt of the poet in childhood. On one of the stones in this ravine he inscribed the words, Byron is

DEAD, ere he was fifteen.

Alfred was the fourth son of the Rev. George Clayton Tennyson, LL.D., rector of Somersby (1807-1831), also rector of Benniworth and Bag Enderby, and vicar of Grimsby (1815). Dr. Tennyson was the eldest son of George Tennyson (1750-1835), who belonged to the Lincolnshire gentry as the owner of Bayons Manor and Usselby Hall. He was graduated at St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1801, and received the degree of M.A. in 1805. The poet's father (1778-1831) was a man of superior abilities and varied attainments, who tried his hand with fair success at architecture, painting, music, and poetry.

Mrs. Tennyson (1781-1865) was a pious woman of many admirable qualities, and characterized by an especially sensitive nature. From his sweet, gentle mother the poet inherited his refined, shrinking nature. She was the daughter of Stephen Fytche (1734-1799), vicar of Louth (1764) and rector of Withcall

(1780), a small village between Horncastle and Louth.

Dr. Tennyson married (Aug. 6, 1806) Elizabeth Fytche; and their first child, George, died in infancy. He moved to Somersby in 1808, and the rectory in this quiet village was their home for many years. According to the parish registers, the Tennyson family consisted of eleven children: Frederick (1807), Charles (1808-1879), Alfred (1809-1892), Mary (1810-1884), Emilia (1811-1889), Edward (1813-1890), Arthur (1814), Septimus (1815-1866), Matilda (1816), Cecilia (1817), Horatio (1819). They formed a joyous, lively household, amusements being agreeably mingled with their daily tasks. They were all handsome and gifted, with marked personal traits and imaginative temperaments. They were very fond of reading and story-telling. At least four of the boys — Frederick, Charles, Alfred, and Edward — were addicted to versewriting.

The scholarly rector carefully attended to the education and training of his children. He turned his talents and accomplishments to good account in stimulating their mental growth. Alfred was a pupil of Louth Grammar School four

years (1816–1820). During this time he presumably learned something, although no flattering reports of his progress have come down to us. Then private teachers were employed by Dr. Tennyson to instruct his boys; but he took upon himself for the most part the burden of fitting them for college. One incident connected with the poet's intellectual life at home is worth repeating. It has been said that his father required him to memorize the odes of Horace, and to recite them morning by morning until the four books were gone through. Perhaps this practice aided him in cultivating a delicate sense for metrical music, in which he certainly surpassed Horace.

Only a moderate amount of study being imposed by his father, Alfred was out-of-doors much of the time, rambling through the pastures and wolds about Somersby and Bag Enderby. The two brothers, Charles and Alfred, were greatly attached to each other, and frequently were together in their walks. They were both large and strong for their age. Charles was a popular boy in Somersby on account of his frank, genial disposition. This cannot be said of the reticent Alfred, who was solitary, not caring to mingle with other lads in their sports. He was shy and reserved, moody and absent-minded, exhibiting when a boy the

same habits and peculiarities which characterized him as a man.

From his twelfth to his sixteenth year Alfred was apparently idle a great part of the time, yet he was unconsciously preparing for his life-work as a poet. He was gathering material and storing up impressions that were afterward utilized. It was with him a formative period. The hours he spent strolling in lanes and woods were not wasted. The quiet, meditative boy lived in a realm of the imagi-

nation, and his thoughts and fancies took shape in crude poems.

This period of day-dreaming was followed by one of intellectual activity. His literary career began in his youth, his boyish rhymes and those of his elder brother Charles being collected into the thin volume, "Poems by Two Brothers," published in 1827. The pieces by Alfred were written when he was only sixteen or seventeen. They show that these were busy years. The Tennyson youths not only scribbled a great deal of verse, they ranged far and wide in the fields of ancient and modern literature. Their father had a fine library, and they appreciated its treasures. In the footnotes and mottoes of their poems were many curious bits of information, and quotations from the classics. In some of them are echoes from Byron, who exercised a magical spell over Alfred in his teens.

The Tennyson children were fortunate in having cultured parents. They were favored in another respect. Dr. Tennyson was comfortably well off for a country clergyman. His means, which he shrewdly husbanded, enabled the family to spend the summers at Mablethorpe and Skagness, on the eastern coast of England. Thus Alfred's passion for the sea was developed early in life. It is said that in his boyhood he occasionally tramped the whole distance (a dozen

miles or more) from Somersby to the coast.

For some years it was the rector's custom to occupy a dwelling in Louth part of the school year. In this way the seclusion and monotony of Somersby life were broken. The young Tennysons saw considerable of Lincolnshire. They occasionally visited the old manor-house of Bayons, and were often welcomed in the home of their aunt, Miss Fytche, in Westgate Place. Charles and Alfred were at times the guests of their great-uncle, the Rev. Samuel Turner, of Caistor, who, dying about 1834, left his property and Grasby living to Charles. The two young poets took the money given them for their first book by Messrs. Jackson, and spent it "in a tour through Lincolnshire, inspecting the different churches, for which the county is so justly famous."